

Note: The transactional processes suggested in CISCE curriculum are highlighted in grey.

Learning Outcomes

- To understand how to deal with success, failure, and the different kinds of people
- To recognize a complete man operating through the thick and thins of life
- To discuss the relevance and validity of these ideas
- To note the use of contrasting images and ideas by the poet
- To note and understand the repetitive nature of the words 'if'

Summary: The poem says that a boy would be able to master the world and, more importantly, master control over himself if he is able to achieve the following traits: Remain calm and rational when others become illogical or even blame you. Stand firm and trust yourself when everyone around questions you. Yet, understand their doubts. Be patient while working towards your goals. When confronted with false accusations or hatred against yourself, do not counterattack. Yet, do not be over-moralistic or preachy. Aim high but be rooted in reality. Success or failure can both be misleading as conditions can change; so, do not be overly affected by either. Do not lose heart if your honest words are twisted by mischief-makers to deceive foolish people. If something that has taken you a lifetime to build is destroyed, begin again from scratch, even if you are tired.

Interact with both ordinary people and powerful people but do not let them affect your values or alienate you from reality. Do not allow either friends or enemies to hurt you. Accept support from people but only up to a limit. Time moves at a fast, relentless pace so make every second worth living; fill each moment with your best efforts. If you do all this, every victory on earth can fall into your lap. More importantly, you will evolve into a worthy person.

Pre-reading

1. What are the qualities you appreciate in parents, teachers and other adults who influence you?
2. How do you think they developed a 'good' character?
3. How important is a balanced approach to life?
4. If someone were to advise you, what kind of advice would you like to hear?

READING

Students comprehend and analyse the poem

Tell students they are going to read the poem, *If*, which is advice given by the poet, Kipling to his son, John. The advice is relevant, even today, to children all over the world.

Read the poem aloud to the class.

Pause at relevant points to explain and check comprehension.

Inform students that the entire poem can be broadly divided into two types of advice.

Encourage them to fill in the two boxes as you read the poem once again.

Two types of advice:

For self-growth	For dealing with others
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Note: The suggested answers are only for the teacher’s reference.

(Suggested answers: For self-growth: integrity, self-confidence, stability

For dealing with others: Worldly wisdom when dealing with cruel people, humility when moving with great people, similar behaviour with the rich and the poor)

Ask students:

What are the two kinds of advice given for a growing child? (self-growth and qualities to deal with others) According to the poet, what are the qualities that are helpful for self-growth? (Integrity, self-confidence, stability) What are the qualities which are good for a person when dealing with others? (worldly wisdom when dealing with cruel people, humility when moving with great people, similar behaviour with the rich and the poor)

Tell students the situations are of two kinds:

- a. When all is ill – *Example:* people blame you, doubt you, lie about you, hate you ...
- b. When all is well – *Example:* when you can dream or think ... When you can talk with crowds or walk with kings ...

Explain the significance of the repetition of the word *If* in the poem.

Note: All of them are conditional clauses introduced by *If*. Each *If* clause refers to a possible condition and the final main clause refers to its probable result.

The verbs in the *If* clauses are in the simple present and the one in the main clause is in the simple future tense. *Example: If you can keep your head ... You will be a Man, my son.*

The *If* clauses present advice from the father to the son. Each of them presents a situation and how the son should respond to it. *Example:* Situation – People blame the son when things go wrong. His response – Calmness

Every response suggested is an ideal response to the situation. *Example:* Situation – People find fault with the son. His response – He should not lose confidence in his self-worth and yet he should be able to accept that his critics may have a point too.

Poetic devices

Rhyme scheme: Each stanza follows an *ababcdcd* rhyme scheme (the first stanza has an *aaaabcbc* scheme).

Personification: *Triumph and Disaster* are treated as imposters, *dreams* become the master, *Will* holds on, and the *minute is unforgiving*.

Alliteration: “Will which”, “sixty seconds”, “Man, my”

Metaphors: repeatedly used throughout the poem *to lose one’s head, twist truth, gamble winnings* and so on.

Imagery: (visual images) *or watch the things you gave your life to, broken/And stoop and build ‘em up with worn-out tools and* (sound images) *Will which* says to them: “Hold on!”

Repetition: *If*

Post-reading

Class discussion:

Do you think the advice is good for children of today? Justify your stand.

Individual work:

Choose any two values listed in the poem and write how they would be useful to you in your present context.

STUDENTS' BOOK ANSWER KEY

If

Comprehension

- A.** 1. a. calm b. yourself c. doubts e. think
f. triumph; disaster g. begin h. heart i. good j. everyone
2. a. waiting b. lies d. good e. wise(ly) f. dreams
g. loss(es) h. common i. friends; enemies j. importance
- B.** 1. a. To keep one's head means to stay calm and sensible. To lose one's head means to become upset and anxious and to not know what to do.
b. *Suggested answer (accept any logical answer):* Others might be blaming something on you when they are too upset by a situation and cannot think calmly and wisely. In such conditions, many people find it easy to blame someone, even if unfairly.
2. *Suggested answers (accept any logical answer):*
- a. The speaker suggests that triumph and disaster should be treated similarly because both of them come and go and none of them is permanent. Often, none of them is as important as we think them to be. So we should not be too thrilled over some triumph or too depressed about some disaster.
- b. Triumph and disaster have been called impostors because often what seems to be a triumph turns out to be not so great, and what seems to be a disaster may be less awful than we thought. These are strong words which are used when we regard something as very important, but the speaker suggests that we should not be overwhelmed by either of these because they may not be as important as we think them to be.
3. *Suggested answer (accept any logical answer):* These lines mean that sometimes, even when one speaks the truth, dishonest people may twist and change those honest and correct words in order to deceive other foolish people. If one can see that happening—see someone changing their honest words for a dishonest purpose—and tolerate it...
4. a. No, the speaker does not refer only to physical objects here. He also means other things, like one may devote one's life to a particular work and then see it fail, or focus their life on a sport or an art and not get proper appreciation or any success.
b. We can stoop and build up such things when they are broken by not giving up. We can accept disappointment or loss and then decide to begin trying again, to work again and hope again so that we may build up something worthwhile even if something else was lost or broken earlier.
5. Our heart and nerve and sinew can serve our turn long after they are gone if they can go on working and supporting us even after the point when they want to give up. This line means that we should be able to make our heart go on being brave and hopeful even when it feels tired and disappointed; we should be able to renew our strength and courage and keep them alive even when it feels like we are exhausted or have no hope left.
6. This line means, 'If you can make the most of your time with hard work...'

C. Suggested answers (accept any logical answer):

1. The speaker says that it is more important to be a Man because here, by 'Man', he means a good human being with several admirable qualities. And according to the speaker, it is more important to be such a person than to feel like owning the world. 'Man' is written with a capital M because the speaker is talking about an ideal man, a man who has an almost perfect character.
2. No, not all the advice given in the poem is easy to follow, many of them are quite difficult; for example, it can be difficult to not be hurt by either friends or enemies. However, everyone should still try to follow this advice because it is good advice and it describes how we can at least try to do the right thing and be better human beings.

Appreciating the Poem

1.
 - a. our master; they should not control us or take up all our energy
 - b. impostors; we should not take them too seriously
 - c. they should be able to serve us even when they are tired
 - d. a strong person; it should be able to encourage and make us keep working even when we want to give up
 - e. even a minute can be very important and so we should make every minute count (a minute's hard work can be very precious, a minute's suffering can be very painful, and a minute's happiness can feel wonderful).
2. *Sample answer:* 'If all men count with you, but none too much' is another example of a paradox in this poem. This line means that we should take into account and be considerate towards everyone; yet, we should not give too much importance to any one person. This asks for a fine balance.

Vocabulary

Free response

Going Further

verity: truth

veracious: true, honest

veracity: truthfulness

aver: say that something is true

verily: truly, honestly

verify: make sure if something is true

verification: act of verifying something

verifiable: can be proved to be true

QUESTION BANK

If

A. Answer in brief.

What is the effect of the phrase 'If you' in the poem *If*?

Ans: 'If you' is repeated several times in the poem. Since the poem is in the form of advice, the phrase 'If you', serves as a guideline to his son. This also suggests that there is no element of forcing one to inculcate the qualities mentioned in the poem. It is purely optional.

B. Answer in detail.

What is the effect of using the technique of repetition? (If)

Ans: Kipling, in the poem, uses the technique of repetition very effectively. Since the whole poem is in the form of advice, *If you* turns out to be an effective technique. The *If you* technique can be summarised as, 'if you can do the thing that I list out here you will in the end have great control over your life and also emerge as a virtuous man'. 'If you' serves as a constant reminder to try to follow his advice.

C. Choose the correct answer.

"If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim" What does it mean to make thoughts your aim?

- Do not make them your focus.
- Make every effort to achieve what you think about.
- Be careful about following your thoughts.

Ans: a

D. Read the lines and answer the questions.

*If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools*

- What do the first two lines refer to?
- What do the last two lines refer to?
- What does 'worn-out tools' refer to?

Ans: a. It says that one should remain unaffected if mischief-makers twist one's honest words to mislead foolish people.

b. If something that has taken you a lifetime to build, is destroyed, you should simply begin again.

c. The old tools are described as worn out with use, also referring to the user's tiredness after years of hard work.

E. Answer in detail. (Think and answer)

Which lines in the poem *If*, give you the feeling that the poet is deeply hurt/saddened by his own past personal experiences? Support your answer.

Ans: The lines: ...*watch the things you gave life to, broken. / And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools...* gives us the feeling that he is talking of his own personal experience. Perhaps he is referring to his own children or some shattering experiences of his own. He talks of giving his life to building something and then sees it broken. There are speculations that this could refer to his family or his work. Worn-out tools could mean the various experiences of the poet who is now an elderly man.